

Reimarus and the Return of Christ Revisited: Reflections on Luke 21:24b and Its Phrase “Times of the Gentiles” in Historicist Perspective

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When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no
more,
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright and fair;
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

—J. M. Black

Where is this *Tuba mirabilis*, or wondrous trumpet¹ of the Lord so movingly described in these vibrant lines of faith sung by Christians for so many years? Will it ever sound? Why have nearly 2000 years passed since Christ promised to return quickly? Are we finally destined to join the scoffers of 2 Peter 3:4 with their jeering appeal to uniformitarianism, saying: “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” What is going on here? Is our biblical exegesis flawed? Did Jesus teach that He would return in the first century A.D.? Did Jesus, as rationalist scientist Stephen Jay Gould claims, “state clearly that the end shall not be long delayed and shall surely occur *within* the lifetime of some people who heard his words”?² If so, has the passage of time confirmed Gould’s charge that Jesus made an “error of timing” in this respect?³ Should we reinterpret the promise of His coming in some non-literal sense? This would be in harmony with what many evangelicals are doing with the biblical accounts

¹Stephen Jay Gould, *Questioning the Millennium* (New York: Harmony, 1997), 74.

²*Ibid.*, 41.

³*Ibid.*, 43.

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of our origin. Due to the findings of science, many evangelical thought leaders are accommodating the biblical account of creation week to mean something other than six literal, contiguous days. Perhaps in similarly analogous fashion we should accommodate the biblical account of the literal return of Christ to mean something else as well?

For reasons like the ones mentioned above, are we now to stand with Rudolph Bultmann, who, following the lead of Herman Reimarus, says that the parousia of “Christ never took place as the New Testament expected. History did not come to an end, and, as every school boy knows, it will continue to run its course”⁴ Bultmann concludes that Christians “can no longer look for the return of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven or hope that the faithful will meet him in the air (1 Thess. 4:15ff).”⁵ This conclusion seems to follow if in fact Christ taught that He would return in the first century A.D. If this is the case, should we remove the beautiful gospel song, mentioned above, from our hymnbooks because Christ’s promise has been falsified by the passage of time?

In light of these questions, the purpose of this study is to consider the potentially stinging problem posed particularly by Reimarus regarding what he considers to be the nature of the New Testament expectation of the parousia, and to assess in an initial and provisional fashion the crucial importance which the cryptic notion of the Gentiles treading Jerusalem until the “times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24b) may carry in helping to solve the dilemma posed by Reimarus and others.

The Problem Raised By Reimarus Regarding the Second Coming

Bultmann’s claim that the New Testament expected the parousia of Christ in the first century has several important historical antedecedents. I shall briefly notice those made by Matthew Tyndall and Hermann Reimarus.

In his book entitled, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, which became known as the “Bible of all deistic readers,”⁶ the English theologian Matthew Tyndall writes in 1730 that “I think, ‘tis plain, *Paul* himself expected to be alive at the Coming of the Lord, and that he had the Word of God for it. . . . If most of the Apostles, upon what Motives soever, were mistaken in a Matter of this Consequence, how can we be certain, that any One of them may not be mistaken in any other Matter?”⁷ This is a stinging conclusion indeed to evangelical Christians who place complete trust in a literal interpretation of passages such as John 14:1-3. Nevertheless, Herman Samuel Reimarus develops even further

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” In *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 5.

⁵Ibid., 4.

⁶Werner George Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (New York: Abingdon), 54.

⁷Quoted in Kümmel, *ibid.*

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some of Tyndall's thoughts that Paul had the teaching of the Lord in support of the idea that Christ would return in the first century.

In 1774 G. E. Lessing began introducing to the scholarly community the writings of the eighteenth-century Hamburg scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus in a work called the *Fragments by the Unknown of Wolfenbüttel*.⁸ Reimarus was deeply influenced by Tyndall's classic deistic book, to the point of adding his own account of what he perceives to be a major mistake in the teaching of Jesus regarding the time of the second advent. Reimarus observes that "if the apostles would have said at that time that there would still be another seventeen, eighteen, or more centuries before Christ would come again from the clouds of heaven to begin his kingdom, people would only have laughed at them."⁹ Why? The reason is, according to Reimarus, that the people took the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:34 about "this generations shall not pass away until all these things take place" to mean that the individuals "who were at that time standing around Jesus at that place should not all have died before his coming, but some of them would see . . . him coming into his kingdom still before their death."

Above all, Reimarus offers the negative assessment of the speech of Jesus in Matthew 24 as a mistaken prophecy. Regarding this he writes:

Only because Christ, unfortunately, did not come again on the clouds of heaven within that time, in fact not even within so many centuries later [as have elapsed], today people try to come to the assistance of the clear falsity of this promise through a clever but certainly very poor interpretation of the words. The words, *this generation will not pass away* must be distorted and now taken to mean the Jewish people or the Jewish nation. So they say the promise might very well stand.¹⁰

Strikingly, in this quotation Reimarus calls the promise of Christ's return a "clear falsity," meaning that it cannot stand. This claim raises several questions. Does Jesus in fact teach that he would return in the first century A.D.? If so, how shall we address the issue raised by Reimarus of the *prima facie* implications of the phrase "this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled"? We turn now to a brief discussion of a suggested possible solution to the problem.

**A Historicist Resolution of the Problem Raised by Reimarus
Regarding the Second Coming of Christ**

⁸G. E. Lessing, *Fragments From Reimarus* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879; reprint ed., Lexington, Kentucky: American Theological Library Association Committee on Reprinting, 1962), 5.

⁹Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *The Goal of Jesus and His Disciples*, trans. George Wesley Buchanan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 106.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

A General Orientation Regarding Luke's Account of the Olivet Discourse. The Olivet Discourse as presented in Matthew 24, in which Jesus outlines the signs of His second coming in some detail, needs to be augmented with crucial information from the parallel account given in Luke 21. An initial important task is to compare the listings of the major signs as presented in each chapter which show, at first reading, an important seeming omission in Luke's list as compared with that given by Matthew and Mark. In Matthew's account, and that of Mark, we find four major distinct, sequential signs preceding the appearing of Jesus: 1. the destruction of earthly Jerusalem (vs. 15-20), 2. a period of tribulation (vs. 21-28), 3. signs in the sun and moon, and 4. the powers of heaven are shaken (v. 29). Then, in both accounts, and also in Luke, the Son of Man (vs. 30-31) appears. All three synoptic gospels give Jesus' explanation that those who see all these signs—including the shaking of the powers of heaven—will not pass, i.e., the individuals comprising that "generation of people" will not pass (die) until Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven (vs. 33-34).

In striking contrast to the four signs listed by Matthew and Mark, Luke apparently presents only three distinct, sequential signs which are to transpire before the appearing of the Son of Man. Luke's listing is as follows: 1. the destruction of earthly Jerusalem (vs. 20-24), and 2. the signs in sun and moon and stars, and 3. the powers of the heavens being shaken (vs. 25-26). The apparent missing sign in Luke's account is the second sign given by Matthew and Mark, namely, the period of tribulation sign.

Is the tribulation sign truly missing in Luke's account? The thesis to be explored in this paper is that the "period of tribulation sign" may not be missing in Luke's account at all, but is present in a cryptic form in Jesus' words regarding a Gentile trampling of Jerusalem until their times are fulfilled. In the first portion of Luke 21:24 the language implies the important point that Jerusalem has already been destroyed because the inhabitants are described as falling before the edge of the sword, and that "they will be led captive into all the nations." This indicates that the first portion of Luke 21:24 presents the description of the destruction of earthly Jerusalem.

However, Jesus immediately continues in the same verse with a seemingly redundant notion that Jerusalem "will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Why does Jesus add this second destructive activity against Jerusalem in view of the fact that He has just employed language implying that the earthly Jerusalem has already been physically destroyed? Could the answer be that Jesus' use of the terms "trampling," "Jerusalem," and "trampling under foot by the Gentiles" in the second half of Luke 21:24b does not refer to the earthly Jerusalem and to its destruction or "trampling" by Gentile Roman soldiers at all, but rather to another kind of trampling by another kind of power, and upon another kind of Jerusalem? Could it be that Luke 21:24b involves some form of a two phase trampling of two different Je-

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rusalems? If so, the theological implication of this conclusion, when interpreted in a historicist fashion, unlocks the problem articulated by Reimarus.

The Apocalyptic Setting of the Phrase the "Times of the Gentiles."

The Olivet discourse in Luke's Gospel is apocalyptic in nature and contains allusions to concepts and terms presented, for example, in Old Testament apocalyptic literature. Jesus' cryptic words in Luke 12:24b are no exception. At least three terms in this portion of the passage, namely, the terms "Gentiles," "trampling," and "times," are crucial allusions to important concepts in the apocalyptic book of Daniel chapters 7-9, 11, and 12, and to parallel concepts in Revelation 11:2, all of which help to unlock the profound meaning of Jesus' statement in this apocalyptic context. We turn first to a consideration of a possible key link between Luke 21:24b and Revelation 11:2 which is, indeed, the basis for the interpretation of Jerusalem in Luke 21:24b as being something other than simply a reference to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem.

The book of Revelation is also apocalyptic literature and is filled with allusions to Old Testament literature, including the apocalyptic genre. Revelation 11:2-3 is a special case in point and is crucial for the interpretation of Luke 21:24b. In Revelation chapter 11 John is asked in vision to measure the "temple of God and the altar and those who worship in it" (v. 1). Because at the time John wrote the book of Revelation the earthly temple and the earthly Jerusalem lay in ruins and could not be literally measured, the measuring described in Revelation 11:2 would seem to refer to some spiritual activity regarding the existing temple of God in heaven and the individuals spiritually worshiping God. Regarding this city, John is told that the Gentiles will "tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months" (v.2), which is the same amount of time as the 1,260 days mentioned in the following verse (v.3), the period of time during which the two witnesses would prophesy. Thus, the treading mentioned in Revelation 11:2 must be a "treading" in the sense of some kind of spiritual warfare or treading, rather than referring to some form of a literal destruction by Gentiles of the earthly Jerusalem, which, as noted, already lay in ruins at Gentile hands. This raises the key question considered by this paper, namely, whether the Gentile "treading of the holy city" for 42 months mentioned in Revelation 11:2 is to be identified with the Gentile "treading of Jerusalem" in Luke 21:24b? If this is the case, the answer to Reimarus is close at hand, as the following discussion indicates.

The Prophetic Setting Outlined

The Gentile Treading of "Jerusalem . . . Until the Times of the Gentiles Is Fulfilled" of Luke 21:24b Identified with the Gentile Treading of the Holy City for 42 Months of Revelation 11:2. In his latest book, entitled *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible*, published in 1997, Hans LaRondelle presents a penetrating historicist discussion of Revelation 11:2

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regarding the Gentile trampling of the Holy City for 42 months. We take a two step approach in analyzing LaRondelle's interpretation. The first step is to note key points of his interpretation and additional considerations showing that the Revelation 11:2 "trampling for the 42 months" is the same as the other time periods mentioned in Daniel 7-9, 11, and Revelation 12 and 13, namely the prophetic time periods such as the 42 months, the 1260 days, and the three and one half times. The second step will be to build upon LaRondelle, but to move beyond him by linking the Gentile trampling of Jerusalem mentioned in Luke 21:24b to the trampling activity of Revelation 11:2b, and thus to the same activity mentioned in Daniel 7-9; 11, and Rev. 12 and 13.

Step One: LaRondelle's Identification of the 42 Months of Gentile Trampling of the Holy City of Revelation 11:2b with the Gentile Trampling of Jerusalem and of the Saints of Daniel 7-9, 11, and Revelation 12 and 13. The prediction of the 42 months of Gentile oppression or "trampling" mentioned in Revelation 11:2 combines or unites identical prophetic time and action elements described in Daniel chapters 7, 8, 9, and 11 with the same time and action elements mentioned in Revelation chapters 11, 12, and 13. LaRondelle shows the importance of basing the time units of Revelation 11-13 on parallel prophetic periods mentioned in the book of Daniel as follows:

Only from the perspective of Daniel's sacred chronology can one avoid the pitfall of taking the prophetic time units of Rev. 11-13 as entirely allegorical for some indefinite time of persecution. The "42 months" or "1260 days" are not elastic or temporal. These time units originate from the vision of Daniel 7, where they determine the tract of time for the despotic reign of the "little horn," after the collapse of the Roman Empire (A.D. 476, see Dan. 7:8, 23-25).¹¹

However, before going into further detail about these key prophetic time periods, a historicist hermeneutical assumption operative in this paper needs to be addressed. The biblical self-application of the apocalyptic interpretive principle known as the "day for a year" principle is concretely illustrated in the book of Daniel itself. In Daniel 9:24 the prophet declares that "seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city." Taken literally, this period is not even two calendar years. In this case many exegetes agree that the "day for year" principle is operative within the apocalyptic biblical text itself. Thus, the phrase "70 weeks" calculates into 490 prophetic days, which in turn represent 490 literal consecutive calendar years. This illustrates the "day for year" principle of prophetic interpretation as operative in the book of Daniel itself. This paper interprets the prophetic time periods mentioned in Daniel and Revelation in this light.

¹¹Hans LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 220.

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Turning to the activity depicted in Revelation 11:2, La Rondelle states that, "The Hebrew source of the 'trampling of the holy city' in Revelation 11 is the trampling of the holy place and its host in Dan. 7-8. Daniel portrays how the temple of God and its true worshipers will be trampled underfoot, not by the Roman Empire but *by a rebellious and idolatrous worship* that causes desolation (see Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:11-13; 11:31-35; 12:11)."¹² Thus, in chapter 7, "Daniel outlined the entire course of salvation history, from his time until the final judgment."¹³ This means that in this chapter, God through Daniel outlines the future shape of worldwide kingdoms on earth, ending with the long standing Imperial Rome. Daniel 7 indicates that subsequent to the fall of this secular power, therefore in the Christian era viewed from our perspective, a spiritually oppressive power arises to taunt God and trouble His people for "a time, times, and a one half time" or 3 1/2 times (v. 25). The same power is said, in Daniel 8:13, to "trample both the holy place and the host," which links Daniel 8 to Revelation 11:2. Moreover, as La Rondelle observes, "This antigod power (the 'little horn') will wear down the saints or 'holy ones' for three-and-a-half prophetic 'times' (or 'years'). This time period equals 42 prophetic months and thus establishes a specific link between *Daniel 7* and *Rev. 11*."¹⁴

Step Two: Linking the Gentile Trampling of Jerusalem "Until the Times of the Gentiles Be Fulfilled," Mentioned in Luke 21:24b, with the Gentile Trampling of the Holy City Mentioned in Revelation 11:2b; and Thus to Revelation 12, 13; and to Daniel 7-9, and 11. Four terms in Luke 21:24b combine to link the Gentile trampling activity specified in this text to the same kind of activity mentioned in Rev. 11:2b and so to the famous identical passages in Daniel 7-9, 11, and in Revelation 12 and 13. These four terms constitute four clear allusions to Old Testament apocalyptic themes. The terms will be considered in couplet fashion. The phrase "the Gentile trampling" forms one couplet comprised of two elements, namely, "gentile" and "trampling". The second couplet is comprised of the following two terms: "Jerusalem" and length of persecution, namely, "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Turning now to the first couplet, several important links can be noted regarding the fact that the power specified is a "Gentile" trampling power (Luke 21:24b). Comparatively, in Daniel 7:25 a similar persecuting power is characterized as a speaking small horn, thus a non-Jewish or Gentile power. Second, this Gentile power of Dan 7:25 engages in a spiritual "trampling" conflict with God and His people by "speaking against the Most High and tearing down the saints of the Highest One" (Dan. 7:25). The description of another little horn of Daniel 8:10-11, 13 is also a non-Jewish power said explicitly to "trample" down some of the stars of heaven (v. 10), to remove the regular sacrifice (v. 11), and to throw down the place of His sanctuary (v. 11), i.e., to trample "both the holy

¹²Ibid., 221.

¹³Ibid., 217-218.

¹⁴Ibid., 218.

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place and the host” (v. 13). This action is consistent with the spiritual meaning of the Gentile “treading” mentioned in Luke 21:24b in light of the spiritual meaning of “Jerusalem” and the “times of the Gentiles” noted below in the discussion of the second couplet.

The trampling of “Jerusalem” mentioned in Luke 21:24b includes of necessity the temple and its worshipers, which is the identical dual object of the trampling activity by both little horns described in Daniel 7:25 and 8:13, and with the activity of the sea beast with a blasphemous mouth which blasphemed God’s name and His tabernacle and who made war with the saints” (Rev. 13:6-7), thus linking the activity just cited in Daniel 7-8 and Revelation 12-13 with the Gentile trampling of “Jerusalem” mentioned in Luke 21:24b.

The interpretation of the length of the period of trampling is of utmost importance. Moreover, a proper understanding of the approximate location of the period of trampling in secular history is a crucial element in linking the period of the Gentile spiritual trampling of Jerusalem indicated in Luke 21:24b to the Gentile trampling mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and 3, and thereby to the trampling activity of both little horn powers of Daniel 7 and 8, and with the serpent of Revelation 12, and with the sea beast of Revelation 13.

In attempting to understand the length of the trampling of Jerusalem by the Gentiles, we note again that Luke 21:24b says that Jerusalem will be trodden under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. The important question is, how long a period is represented by the plural term “times” of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24b)? The answer involves four considerations. First, Revelation 11:2 links a Gentile trampling of the Holy City to a prophetic time period specified as 42 months in length (Rev 11:2). Importantly for our purposes the next verse following Revelation 11:2 mentions a period of time in which God’s two witnesses prophesy for “twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth” (Rev 11:3). Forty-two prophetic months of 30 days yield 1260 days, indicating that the two time periods are identical and should be connected. This means the 42 prophetic months mentioned in Revelation 11:2 are the same as the 1260 prophetic days mentioned in v. 3. This conclusion forms an important connection between the temporal activity of the Gentile trampling of Revelation 11:2 and the serpent activity mentioned in Revelation 12:6, 14. After the male child (Christ) had been “caught up to God,” the woman (representing believers in Christ living after His ascension), was nourished in the wilderness, in hiding from the serpent (red dragon) for “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 12:6). This links the 42 months trampling of Rev. 11:2 with the 1260 days of serpent persecution of the woman (Rev. 12:13-14).

Furthermore, the 1260 prophetic day period mentioned in Revelation 12:6 is described in the same chapter as “a time and times and half a time” (Rev 12:14). This means 42 prophetic months equal 3 1/2 prophetic times, or 3 1/2 prophetic years composed of 360 prophetic days. Because we have just seen that

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42 prophetic months equal 1260 prophetic days, we can now conclude that 1260 prophetic days equal 3 1/2 prophetic times.

Of equal importance is the fact that because the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6 are clearly shown to follow the ascension of Jesus, as noted above, the 1260 prophetic days and the 3 1/2 times are thereby shown to be located in the Christian era, historically speaking. Because these two time periods are the same as the 42 months, the 42 months of Revelation 11:2 are also located in the Christian era.

In addition, the sea beast with a blasphemous mouth characterized in Revelation 13:5-7 is said to spiritually attack God's name, His tabernacle, and to make war with the saints for a period of 42 prophetic months (Rev 13:5-7). Because this activity is associated with a beast that is composed of the world beasts of Daniel 7 and receives its power from the serpent mentioned in Revelation 12, and is said to oppress the saints and God's tabernacle for the same amount of time as the serpent oppression mentioned in Revelation 12:6, 14, the 42 prophetic months of the sea beast persecution is to be equated with the 1260 prophetic days of Revelation 12:6, and thereby is also to be located in history after the ascension of Christ, and hence in the Christian era.

The linking of the "times of the Gentile" trampling in Luke 21:24b with the 3 1/2 times, the 1260 days, and the 42 months of Revelation 11:2, 12-13, leads us to the linking of these same time periods with their original formulations in Daniel 7-9, 11 and 12. The 3 1/2 times of Revelation is an allusion to the 3 1/2 times of the little horn of Dan 7:25. Similarly, the 1260 prophetic days and 3 1/2 prophetic years respectively of Revelation 12:6, 14 represent the identical time period of an entity mentioned in Daniel 8:13, and the wonders occurring during the 3 1/2 times of Daniel 12:7. Thus, these prophetic time periods from a historicist perspective translate into a real historical time period, subsequent to the ascension of Jesus, consisting of nearly thirteen centuries.

A final link between the Gentile trampling in Luke 21:24b is the presence of the plural form of the Greek word "times" (*kairos*). In light of all the other indicators noted above, the plural usage of "times" in Luke 21:24b might be an allusion to the plural usage of "times" in Daniel and Revelation, i.e., to the 3 1/2 times of Daniel 7:25, and to the 3 1/2 times of Revelation 12:14. Thus, as indicated above, when the "times" of Luke 21:24b are linked to the 42 months of Gentile trampling mentioned in Revelation 11:2, the "times" of Luke 21:24b also represent 42 months or 1260 days or the 3 1/2 times (*kairos*) of Revelation 12:14 and Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 12:7.

In sum, these reflections indicate that the "times" of the Gentile trampling mentioned in Luke 21:24b represent 42 prophetic months, or 1260 prophetic days, or 3 1/2 prophetic times which all indicate that nearly thirteen centuries of historical time are to transpire after the literal destruction of the earthly Jerusalem before the second coming of Christ. Thus, the second sign to occur before the return of the Lord, namely, the Gentile trampling of Jerusalem of Luke

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21:24b, equals the “tribulation” sign mentioned by Matthew and Mark, and extends for nearly thirteen centuries, beginning sometime after the collapse of Imperial Rome. How does this lengthy Gentile spiritual trampling of Jerusalem and literal persecution of His saints on earth relate to the fact that Jesus connects the literal destruction of Jerusalem with a fulfilment of the abomination of desolation mentioned by the prophet Daniel?

A Two-Phase Gentile Trampling of Jerusalem

In light of the previous discussions, could it be that the words of Jesus in Luke 21:24 indicate a two phase trampling of Jerusalem and its worshipers? Phase one (Luke 21:24a) would be accomplished by a Gentile force directed against the literal earthly Jerusalem. However, in Luke 21:24b we enter phase two of the trampling of Jerusalem which would now be understood to be conducted by a different form of Gentile force and directed of necessity against a Jerusalem and temple still standing and the relevant worshipers. This reality would appropriately be the complex of the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly priestly ministry of Christ, and His earthly worshipers.

This two phase trampling may also be implied in Daniel 9:26-27 in connection with Jesus’ account of the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew and Mark. Jesus links the destruction of earthly Jerusalem with the abomination of desolation spoken of in Daniel 9:27. However, Daniel 9:26-27 speaks not only of a destruction of the earthly city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary (abomination), but also of a subsequent desolation unto the end (abomination). In fact, Daniel 9:27 describes or covers the destruction of the city and the subsequent desolations mentioned in the previous verse 26 with the significant term abominations, which is, significantly, in the plural form, in order to cover both kinds of abominations. This indicates that according to Daniel 9:27, the destruction of earthly Jerusalem is called abomination, and the subsequent destructions are denoted abomination. This hints at some form of a two phase abomination of desolation. Jesus’ words in Luke 21:24b begin to give shape to the second phase of this two phase abomination of desolation. Daniel 9:27a depicts the first or physical phase of the abomination of desolation which occurred in 70 A.D. Daniel 9:27b characterizes the spiritual or second phase of the abomination of desolation, which is now linked to the Gentile trampling of Luke 21:24b.

If the cryptic language of Jesus recorded in Luke 21:24b indicates a second form of persecution after the destruction of the literal Jerusalem, these words spoken by Jesus would constitute Luke’s way of describing the very same event which Matthew and Mark call the “tribulation,” which transpires in history subsequent to the literal destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:21, 29; and Mark 13:19, 24). This would mean that all three synoptic gospels present the same four signs as transpiring before the Lord returns, but that Luke’s description of the second sign provides the answer to the charge by Reimarus that Jesus inaccurately

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taught that He would return in the first century A.D. We turn now to a discussion of the implications of this conclusion.

Theological Conclusions

In view of the detailed discussion presented above, one may now conclude that in giving the special information in Luke 21:24b, Jesus Christ, the Creator, the incarnate second person of the Godhead, the wisdom of God, the originator of the Old Testament apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, seems to have blended the events of the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem with His second coming. In response to the disciples private question, "When shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" (Matt 24:3), Jesus does not separately discuss the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming. Perhaps in typical, thoughtful consideration, now regarding their incomplete understanding of the nature of the kingdom, Christ mercifully merges his description of the event of the destruction of Jerusalem with his account of the end of the world. Regarding this action, one writer suggests that, "Had [Christ] opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight."¹⁵ Building upon this understanding, the same expositor states that, "It was in mercy to his disciples that Christ blended these events [the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world], leaving them to study out the meaning for themselves."¹⁶ This would place the disciples under the comforting tutelage of the Spirit who leads into all truth.

The positive effect of such instruction by the Holy Spirit is evident later in the early church, when we hear Paul warning his beloved Thessalonians that even though lawlessness is "already at work" (2 Thess 2:7), the second coming of Christ will not occur before the "man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Thess 2:3), which event Paul indicates is still future in his day. Thus, in Holy Spirit illumined fashion, Paul points his brethren to what may best be described as the "then far-distant future for the coming of the Lord."¹⁷

In light of the fact that Daniel states that prophetic passages relating to the last days: "are concealed and sealed up until the end time" (Dan 12:9), there is no duplicity or deceit present in Jesus' blending the two events and speaking in cryptic, Old Testament apocalyptic-laden language in Luke 21:24b. Rather, the discourse is a brilliant display of the merciful depths of divine wisdom. No less a divine personage than the risen Lord Himself sent His angel to inspire John the Revelator with the additional apocalyptic visions giving more orientation and precision to the phrase regarding the Gentile trampling mentioned in Luke 21:24b.

¹⁵Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 628.

¹⁶Ellen G. White, "Words of Warning—No.3" *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 75:52 (December 27, 1898): 635.

¹⁷Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 356.

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With the passage of time and with the unsealing of the sealed time portions of the apocalyptic book of Daniel at the prophetic time of the end in the religious awakening of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the meaning of the cryptic prophetic time portions of the signs, as presented by Christ in his Olivet discourse and as recorded in the gospel of Luke 21:24b, become clear.

In sum, the present historicist interpretation of the brief phrase in Luke 21:24 regarding the Gentile trampling of Jerusalem until the times of the Gentiles is fulfilled indicates that Jesus clearly did not teach that He would return in the first century. Rather, Luke 21:24b actually indicates that many centuries are to pass before the Son of Man appears in the clouds of heaven. This means Christian believers today have the humble privilege of tracing the fulfillment of nearly all of the signs outlined to occur before the return of Christ, and thus knowing that the passage of many centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 has not invalidated the promise of our Lord to return to this earth.

So, Professor Reimarus, His promise still stands. The trumpet of the Lord will soon sound. This means the precious gospel message should continue to be proclaimed with confidence. Therefore, with fervent joy based upon the saving grace of Christ and the faithfulness of His word, let us continue to sing:

On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ
shall rise,
And the glory of His resurrection share,
When His chosen ones shall gather to their home beyond the
skies,
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

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